

Nathaniel Hawthorne Society Biennial Summer Meeting, 12-15 June 2014  
North Adams, MA  
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

*“[The children] had already made acquaintance with [the  
snow-storm] by tumbling heels over head into its highest drifts,  
and flinging snow at one another, as we have just fancied the  
Berkshire mountains to be doing.”  
“The Paradise of Children”<sup>i</sup>*

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## Writing for Kids: Hawthorne as Grandfather Impersonated

*"The author has long been of opinion that many of the classical myths were capable of being rendered into very capital reading for children."*  
"Preface"<sup>ii</sup>

### A. Introduction

*"'Poh, poh, Primrose!' exclaimed the student, rather vexed. 'I don't believe I can tell one of my stories in the presence of grown people. Besides, your father is a classical scholar; not that I am much afraid of his scholarship, neither, for I doubt not it is as rusty as an old case-knife by this time. But then he will be sure to quarrel with the admirable nonsense that I put into these stories, out of my own head, and which makes the great charm of the matter for children, like yourself. No man of fifty, who has read the classical myths in his youth, can possibly understand my merit as a reinventor and improver of them.'"* "Tanglewood Fireside: Introductory to 'The Three Golden Apples'"

The reaction of Primrose's father, Mr. Pringle, is absolutely essential to understand and measure the whole importance of this literary exercise that is the rewriting of classical Greek myths. Indeed, in him we cannot but hear Hawthorne's own schizophrenic voice, now tender and indulgent, now harsh and intolerant towards his own literary gifts. We are here referring our scholarly colleagues to the exchange that unfolds between Eustace and Mr Pringle at the end of the story about the three golden apples, in this "After the Story" by the "Tanglewood Fireside" (pp.114-115, CE, VII).

When Hawthorne chose to give the name of "Tanglewood" to his collection of children tales, he did so in a metatextual way that was to characterize the overall bulk of these. Indeed, the mention of the name "Tanglewood" occurs in the story entitled "The Gorgon's Head", the first one of a rather long series of such mythology-inspired tales that was to provide their author with an un hoped-for fame and source of much wanted and needed revenue. (p.13) This place is described as having "the aspect of this beautiful and comfortable world" (p.13), a phrase that the reader will inevitably take as a nineteenth-century phrasing, one which transfers a way of thought shared by Hawthorne as a Puritan American pre-Civil War citizen onto a mindset born in Antique Greece. Such phrase is bound to convey a

visionary encapsulation of the natural scenery and atmosphere while it also allows the narrator to introduce his protagonists in a place which will be the locus and literal pretext of all the foregoing adventures of Hawthornian Greek heroes. As locus, this Tanglewood region welcomes a bunch of children and a male youth who is going to be their story-teller for more than one occasion.

Our approach to these tales, as the title of our communication hints, mainly concerns the various processes by which Hawthorne is reflecting on his writing for kids. Metanarration, metafiction and metadiscourse are thus to be much used in this study, especially in their Genettian meanings for which his theoretical writings are more than enlightening. Hawthorne thus evinces a deep sense of intuition for those twentieth-century concepts. Many things, from the subtitle and introductory sections of each tale (present only in the *Wonder Book*) to the humorous tints interspersed here and there, point to this auto-reflective fiction that Hawthorne resorts to titillate his readers' interest and literary (not to say intellectual) curiosity. Even the names of the kids that constitute the private audience of Eustace Bright are all plays on words, references to those flowers that hold so much symbolism in Hawthorne's novelistic fiction.

To get a foretaste of what our study is going to be like, just let us take one probing example of the mood that Hawthorne creates and nourishes throughout his mythological fiction. As he is introducing and speaking of his main narrator and story-teller, Eustace Bright, the author (or, more precisely, intradiegetic, homodiegetic narrator) is discreetly, subtly and humorously paving the way for the forthcoming Greek atmosphere with the imagined identification of Eustace with Quicksilver: "as if he had wings to his shoes" (p.15). The reference to these magical boots is a perfect introduction to the significantly fantastic universe of Greek mythology as much as it is a perfect example of the numerous humorous traits of Hawthorne's imaginative mind.

The overall structure of the *Wonder Book* collection is one of embedded narrative voices: "[...], and more of such valuable property than I could tell of in a printed page" (p.68, "The Paradise of Children"). This "I" is the anonymous narrator's, maybe too schematically assimilated to the real author's subjective "I". This anonymous narrator is only one of the many personae, or literal masks, which he (the author) dons in an attempt to get as many narrative and literary outlets as he has fictional and fictive identities. The process of self-parody, even of self-pastiching, is everywhere subtly set in place, and only waits for the

master's stroke to be set in tragic motion. The promises that the narrative voice admits not to keep ("more...than I could tell of") in the restrained format that is the physical written page and printed book, enhance all the more the literary promises that he should keep. An aborted promise of frustrated prolific writing comes, in Hawthorne's case, with the promise of many other to-be-fulfilled promises, reasonable in terms of page printing space, yet altogether satisfying in terms of narrative richness.

Our exposé will thus be formed in three distinctive parts, one on metanarration proper, another on Hawthorne's humor, and the last one will tackle the issue of identification. This latter issue will be our focusing point during this oral presentation.

## **B. Metanarration and Metafiction at the Service of Children's Literary Interest**

*"So Eustace Bright sat down in the chair which he had just been skipping over, took Cowslip upon his knee, ordered silence throughout the auditory, and began a story about a sad naughty child, whose name was Pandora, and about her playfellow Epimetheus. You may read it, word for word, in the pages that come next." "The Paradise of Children"<sup>iii</sup>*

In this part, we would like to analyze the various manifestations of those fictional processes, and, more importantly, their role and function in Hawthorne's mythological tales.

But, first let speak a word on the narrator's source of inspiration. One example is to be found in the genesis of "The Golden Touch", or at least what the narrator professes to be the intradiegetic origin: the latter is to be extracted directly from the immediate natural environment of Eustace Bright. Nature, this Wordsworthian source of creative imagination, is here the cradle of this "spontaneous play" that is one of the veritable tokens of literary gift. The natural scenery seems in perfect harmony with the tale to follow, or rather, it is the tale that perfectly harmonizes with nature, is literally inspired from the splendid alchemic processes that are unfolding under the very nose and eyes of Eustace Bright. That would indeed be a shame not to benefit from this primary and uncontaminated source of inspiration. It will also be an adequate moral illustration of what is revealed to be Midas's tragic flaw, namely, the monomaniac desire to dispose of nature's overwhelming powers:

It had come into his mind as he lay looking upward into the depths of a tree, and observing how the touch of autumn had transmitted every

one of its green leaves into what resembled the purest gold. (p.46,  
"The Golden Touch")

In the course of "The Gorgon's Head", Hawthorne resorts to the technique of embedded stories. Perseus tells a story to the young man with the staff, who is no other than Quicksilver, one character that crosses the textual space to be found in several tales, a sort of textual and diegetic link, even thread that knits the whole mythological fabric of Hawthorne's Puritan imagination. In his turn, Quicksilver tells Perseus stories on their way to the fateful place as a pastime (p.25). This technique tends to mimic the narrator-listener relationship at two levels: on the one side we have Hawthorne and the implied reader, and on the other side, Eustace Bright and the children. This multiplication of narrative layers create a complex network of narrative relationships implying the authority and reliability of the narrator on the one hand, and the interest, engagement, identification and (moral) concerns of the reader/listener on the other hand. It thus contributes to preserve and nourish a certain amount of vivacity in the story-telling process. Interaction and interactivity are not precluded contrary to what Eustace may have let us believe when he entreats Primrose to "hold [her] tongue" (p.17). The reverse would indeed be truer. In fact, this interactive game is indeed encouraged, or at least, excited.

Eustace Bright seems to be playing the role of storyteller with great pleasure, even if he pretends not to want to tell the children "a dozen better stories than that about the Gorgon's Head!" (p.45, "The Golden Touch"). Indeed, he capitalizes on the children's excitement, curiosity and natural insatiability for original, magical, marvellous and breathtaking things. So, he feeds on their wanting, desiring and even almost needing it to excite even more their interest, titillate their imagination. They will literally wonder at what this "dozen better stories" may well be. They had liked "The Gorgon's Head" (except for Primrose who truly minimizes the literary gift displayed by this young "Grandfather"), so what would it be if Eustace really had better stories in store? The young talented teller is counting on this strategy of stirring excitement on the promise of better achievements to come. In a way, this resembles the commercial relationship that will be bound to develop between an author and his publisher. Indeed, after the success of, say, a novel or a collection of tales, the personal publisher will expect, if not outrightly demand, another such successful piece of writing to capitalize on what can be called the effect of novelty: it is good, it is new, it works, so let's do it again! This recipe seems easy to follow, and, above all, infallible. The children react as a

publisher would, and exhorts his literary golden goose to hatch another of her most precious eggs.

Why did we assume that he “pretends” to be tired of telling stories? Because it is clear that he appreciates to be applauded, and, even more so to be in demand and popular. Indeed, doesn’t he sound a bit ironic when he apparently deplorably exclaims: “I wish I were a great deal duller than I am, or that I had never shown half the bright qualities with which Nature has endowed me; and then I might have my nap out, in peace and comfort!”, this being as he feels, “the consequence of having earned a reputation!” (p.46, “The Golden Touch”). We cannot but hear Hawthorne’s own voice in these lines, he who cannot but rejoice at the newly-won fame which he craved for in his chamber under the eaves where he lived relatively secluded, for many years in the literal darkness from which he dreamt of being released. At least do we know where his family name comes from, being naturally bright, he could not but be named after the one quality that he has inherited from generous Mother Nature. Is it false modesty or true natural gift?

This act of false modesty is ingeniously discriminated, if not utterly condemned by a cynic narrative voice who seems to read the utmost secret desires and motivations. This reflects what deeply lies in Eustace’s heart and mind, who, more than anything else, does not want to “have a nap out, in peace and comfort!” He desires, needs to be constantly solicited. The reader’s demand, if it does not set the storyteller’s fancy at work, is actually a realistic enough incentive to try his best. If it does not fuel his imagination, it at least throws the first coals in the furnace of his scorching mind:

But Cousin Eustace, as I think I have hinted before, was as fond of telling his stories as the children of hearing them. His mind was in a free and happy state, and took delight in its own activity, and scarcely required any external impulse set it at work. (p.46, “The Golden Touch”)

The literary experience is one of mutual sharing, even if, the narrator seems to imply, it is also a solitary venture on the writer’s or teller’s part. Indeed, the chiasmic structure – though not perfect – implies the existence of a tacit functional two-ways channel of transmission and reception, a channel that conveys what can really be termed, without exaggeration, literary delight. Writer/teller and reader/listener gain from this unique fanciful experience. In fact, more than a chiasmic structure, by which items get reversed, at least

structurally, thereby contributing to the unification or unifying of what was supposed to be kept apart because utterly different, it would be more appropriate to speak of a perfectly mirroring parallel structure by which the items, apart from being assimilated by ways of their common qualities, are kept distinct, thereby denoting their specific attributes which, if brought together, contribute to create a harmonious whole. In the case of literary experiences, Eustace Bright brings in his gift for creating stories, the child their gift for being excited. Put together, they form a sphere of imaginative and creative experience. One doesn't exist without the other. A teller needs to tell *to* somebody, as a tale-listener requires something or someone to listen *to*.

This mutual dependence in a way undermines the self-assertive affirmation of independence that the second part of the quotation seems to glorify. Indeed, a writer certainly needs a certain amount of seclusion, which, in Hawthorne's case, was truly necessary to set his mind at work. The self-centered process of literary motivation is here described as a sort of monomaniac fantasy that feeds on itself to produce extraordinary pieces of imaginative patterns.

This embedded narrative technique allows the reader to make stock of the diegetic situation, and, since it is meant for children to read (or listen), it can also help them better understand what the story is about. It avoids misunderstandings, erases possible misinterpretations (or, at the very least, triggers a metareflective, though unconscious, process to rectify what may seem to be an awkward reading), permits diegetic reevaluations, especially as far as characterization is concerned. In Perseus's case, this tentative and exhaustive (re-)telling (for the reader) enables him to reinstate Quicksilver (or so he is called by one of his names) in the rank of possible "**ADJUVANTS**" Thus, character, implied readers and real readers gain from such a metanarrative incursion. Despite its possible ponderous quality (as it tends to be quite repetitive), this embedding process truly cristallizes the narrative gifts of the one performing it: at the very end, Hawthorne is the legitimate claimant of such a classic yet genial literary strategy, for, at the bottom of it, his motivations go beyond the mere excitement of literary interest in the tale being told. It is a pure literary *parti-pris* meant to inscribe and revendicate his fiction *as* fiction. Far from Hawthorne the idea to claim his tales and mythological adventures as anything more than pure intellectual, literary, imaginative recreation.

One fictional element recurs in the collection of the *Wonder Book Tales for Boys and Girls*, but is absent from the *Tanglewood Tales*, and serves the multiple function of metanarration and metafiction. It is what Hawthorne calls “the After Story”. In the case of “The Gorgon’s Head”, for example, it is entitled “Tanglewood Porch”, a kind of postface-like piece of writing that serves to wrap up the story in a grand metanarrative finale. Incidentally, we also find an “Introductory” session before each of the tales, and the principle is the same as the concluding one. It is the time and place to, among other things, collect the various reactions of the different auditors who have each and every one of them received the telling of the adventures in a particular and personal way according to their sex, age, affinities, sensibility and intellectual capacities. These sessions (introductory and conclusive) also serve to build a textual and discursive bridge between what they are (metanarrative and metafictional pieces) and what they refer to (the tale proper). Let’s take the example of the “Shadow Brook” introductory part to “The Golden Touch”. The shadow adumbrated in and by the title is reverberated in this prefatory chapter. Like “the Tanglewood Porch”, introductory segment to “The Gorgon’s Head”, it serves to metaphorically and literally set up the tone and scenery for the ongoing events: “the shade of so many clustering branches, meeting and intermingling across the rivulet, was deep enough to produce a moontide twilight”, (p.44, “The Golden Touch”). The metadiscursive deduction, “Hence came the name of Shadow Brook” (p.44, “The Golden Touch”) makes it perfectly clear.

Like “The Gorgon’s Head”, “The Golden Touch” story is followed by an “After the Story” segment which recapitulates the overall moral message of the story, and, more importantly, “checks” if, or makes sure it was received by the young audience, and well received. Eustace Bright, as a good storyteller, inquires from his children if, first, they are satisfied with his story, and second, if it was one of the best stories they ever had the chance to listen to. Incidentally, he deftly though discreetly refers to his other stories, the ones he already told, and, too, the ones he is about to tell, those which only we, the extradiegetic public, can take a glance at (where the intradiegetic public can only have a guess at) as we take the paperback of this collection of tales in our hands: “‘Well, children’, inquired Eustace, who was very fond of eliciting a definite opinion from his auditors.” (p.64, “Shadow Brook: After the Story” of “The Golden Touch”).



Clear-cut opinions, personal, original feedback are what interest talented tellers. A piece of literary writing, whether it be a written document or a piece of oral storytelling, can only be valuable for the reactions it elicits. All types of reaction are welcome and worthy to be shared with the rest of the literary community. For example, “saucy Primrose” still true to herself, evinces a smart, piquant, straightforward sense of judgment for her young age, a rare quality that we suspect to be a mere projection of Hawthorne’s self-deprecating tendency onto outwardly cynical character. In fact, we could almost say that Eustace Bright and Primrose are both surrogate author figures, each representing a reaction that Hawthorne was liable to have regarding the reception of his own work by himself: one is utter self-satisfaction and gratification, one which Eustace proudly displays at the end of the telling sessions; the other is utter scorn, one that Primrose does not feel ashamed nor bashful to evince, at the great dismay of the self-praised narrator, to the point that Eustace humorously wished that “Primrose were worth half as much [as two thousand pounds of gold]” (p.65, “The Golden Touch”).

Regarding the reactions of the audience, the figure of Primrose is more than a revealing and pertinent illustration of such auditory reaction. She is truly the figure of the cold critique, who takes his or her own vision for the one and only true and valid interpretation. The literary pleasure derived from such a session of storytelling is reduced to a hide-and-seek with potential lurking absurdities, inadequacies and such imaginative faults and deficiencies. Primrose, far from being convinced by the overall story, finds fault in the narrator’s ridiculous prerogative to “tur[n] Mercury into Quicksilver, and tal[k] about his sister!” (p.42, “The Gorgon’s Head”). Here, in fact, Primrose pinpoints to the preliminary duty incumbent on anyone who ventures to write or, even more so, to tell a story. Indeed, Eustace’s remark to this sagacious pique (“sagacious”, here is a word that Hawthorne would have loved to hear!) reveals the degree of spontaneity with which he hatched this tailless creature which the tale is (at least, for the smart little girl): “‘And was she not a sister?’ asked Eustace Bright. ‘If I had thought of it sooner, I would have described her as a maiden lady, who kept a pet owl!’” (p.42, “The Gorgon’s Head”). This ingenious reply encloses the piece of criticism flung at him by a reactive and cynic Primrose to, in a way, fling it back at her. Indeed, the implied cliché of the nice maiden, beautiful and harmless at her needle with a pet animal as her only fit companion, is disparaged in Eustace’s mouth, as if his voice was Hawthorne’s very own, tired of the endless reproach of lack of originality by the very ones who implemented and

inscribed those very clichés deep into the literary imaginative pattern, not to be extracted but by the only courageous literary pioneers.

With Eustace, Hawthorne seems to be writing the apology of spontaneity in youth's literary gifts, praising this natural and honest quality. To be sure, he doesn't depreciate the "trained diligence of mature years" "when toil has perhaps grown easy by long habit, and the day's work may have become essential to the day's comfort, although the rest of the matter has bubbled away!" (p.46, "The Golden Touch"), though we can feel a sting of resentment, self-resentment even, at becoming, inevitably, a sort of mechanic writer. Spontaneity seems to be supplanted by this "toil", this overwhelmingly insensitive yet essentially vital figure to which Hawthorne incidentally devoted one piece of typically humorous tales, entitled "Little Daffydowndilly". This toil, unfortunately, and, though hopefully not, almost necessarily, tends to adulterate the writer's imagination, putting it under a sort of creative restraint or even straight jacket that slackens any movement of free fancy. Yet, maturity cannot be safely put aside without risking to fall into another extreme, which is lack of dexterity.

Eustace's remark also feeds on Primrose's criticism of the flatness of the character of Quicksilver's sister. His authoritative defense is one of lack of preparation. Indeed, the underlying regret, or wish, introduced by the hypothetical-cum-past-present-tense sentence, supposes the necessary and, here, skipped, step to achieve a full-fledged narrative, coherent and satisfying from head to boot, or, rather, in our metafictional mindset, from head title to final period. But the tone of this pithy answer is decisively one of humoristic sarcasm, even a slightly ironic self-deprecation, a relatively narrative and authorial satisfaction disguised.

One of the master's strokes performed by Hawthorne is to have instituted a temporal continuity as well as a diegetic continuum between the different mythological pieces of the collection *A Wonder Book for Boys and Girls*. Indeed, more than a just a superficial trick to, perhaps, raise the sale levels hopefully to be reached, it also creates a coherent universe in which every kid reader will manage to find his or her place. He or she will be familiar with this young storyteller and all his lively tribe of peculiar and original children. It follows, in a way, the narrative pattern established, by the Oriental story-teller of the *Arabian Nights*: each night its story. In Hawthorne's case, too, each day the sun will rise with, in its wake, its own piece of fictional happenings.

From a more metanarrative point of view, it responds to some need of familiarity within this very fictional narrative pattern and overall scheme which is the collecting and bringing together of various original tales. The intertextuality (here it would be more accurate to speak of “intratextuality” though, if we choose to consider those tales part of one overall narrative architecture which is *A Wonder Book for Boys and Girls*) is here a warranty of internal coherence and cohesion. It is also a wink at the former stories which, obviously, impressed the fictional audience, who are still absorbed in Perseus’s universe, hypnotized into this magical, marvellous and mythological world where people, with their winged shoes at their feet, can rise above the highest mountain and cross the largest ocean. Children tend to confer those qualities to the one who told them about it, visualizing each and every one of those fits of imagination, pushing their own imagination still further as in this passage where Eustace, Perseus-like, accomplishes what the kids view as epic gestures:

Dandelion, Clover, Cowslip, and Buttercup were almost persuaded that he had winged slippers, like those which the Nymphs gave Perseus, so often had the student shown himself at the tiptop of a nut-tree, when only a moment before he had been standing on the ground. And then, what showers of walnuts had he sent rattling down upon their heads, for their busy little hands to gather into the baskets! In short, he had been as active as a squirrel or a monkey, and now, flinging himself down on the yellow leaves, seemed inclined to take a little rest. (p.45, “The Golden Touch”)

## C. Hawthorne’s Humor

### 1. Humor and Diegesis

Hawthorne’s humor is one which we could describe as “contextual humor”, or “diegetic humor”. Indeed, he falls back on his narrative plot to draw the best humorous references he can think of. One probing example of such humor is found in “The Gorgon’s Head” when the narrator (or Eustace Bright) plays on words with the children’s sight and their faculty of literary comprehension, a wink at the blindness of the Gorgons who must share between them three the vision provided by only one movable eye (p.28).

Children, Hawthorne certainly knew it by experience, are likely to be carried away by any exciting incentive. In the world of literature, too, children can be predictable, and narrators can easily know, feel and so write what would be interesting to them and what

would be scary, funny or sad, to say it in the simple words of little kids. For example, at the beginning of “The Golden Touch” myth, the narrator confidently supposes that “you would have laughed to hear how noisibly it [the lake] babbled about this current.” (p.44, “The Golden Touch”). There again, we find the usually puns so effective with children, and yet such as we can find in some of the more mature tales and even in the achieved novels of Nathaniel Hawthorne. The semi-personification contrived in this sentence truly enhances the child literature dimension of those tales. “Semi” because, apart from my being contaminated by Hawthorne’s linguistic mindset and idiosyncrasies (with his almos, but, halves, and scarcies!), even if the verb “babble” points towards a speech quality endowed to the lake or brook, it also imitates the bubbling motion of the current as it streams down. The onomatopoeic quality serves the process of personifying this natural entity, which, globally taken, partakes of the humoristic effect of the narrator’s telling.

## 2. Humor and Irony

Hawthorne’s humor can verge on the tragic irony that he particularly cherishes, especially in his long fiction. But in this collection of tales, this kind of humor can help children accepting the hard facts of the fictional reality, as it emphasizes this passage from figurative wish to literal truth and realization. Two examples will permit us to better understand this twofold process of comic literalization. The first one is to be found in “The Golden Touch”: “Here was literally the richest breakfast that could be set before a king, and its very richness made it absolutely good for nothing” (p.58, “The Golden Touch”). In these tales for children, oftener than not, Hawthorne resorts to this process of literality to strike the moral cord as well as the humorous string of his audience. Midas suffers from the very realization of the one wish that could ever make him happy. Unfortunately he did not plan those dreadful practical consequences, and must, figuratively, pay the highest price for it. The figurative richness that should have remained figurative has been made literal and, ironically, thereby has lost all its richness and practicality. And the transformation back into figurative normality is, if not quite impossible, very costly to King Midas. He needs to learn the richness that is not quantifiable but measurable (even this adjective is problematic!) in terms of love, sympathy and tenderness. The paradoxical, and thus humoristic and ironic, worthlessness of this display of golden riches is precisely the paradox that Midas has to surpass and integrate into his own sphere of compassion. When he realizes that the only truly worthy richness is the

love of his daughter, it is too late. “The Golden Touch” has again stricken and his “precious, precious Marygold” (p.59, “The Golden Touch”) has ironically become literalized.

The second example that we introduced earlier is, again, found in “The Golden Touch”: “Oh, terrible misfortune! The victim of his insatiable desire for wealth, little Marygold was a human child no longer, but a golden statue!” (p.59, “The Golden Touch”). One can ponder at the humorous side of this quotation. In fact, the humoristic touch brought by the narrator helps here children to accept the terribly tragic fate of Marygold of which they are being told. Indeed, the reification of Marygold can be a traumatizing literary experience for sensitive children. But at the same time, to hammer this moralistic lesson into these young heads, authors, of which Hawthorne is indisputably a legitimate part, need sometimes to go on the horror side of fictional potentialities. The use of the word “misfortune”, in Midas’s case, is quite *osé* as it is clearly not a lack of material fortune that is here deplored by the narrative voice, but definitely this luck goddess which throws its wheels at him in an ironic turn that will leave him on the emotional lurch. We could almost risk another comically ironic pun: the fortune which Midas cumulated unsatisfyingly and craved for was misplaced: by kissing his daughter Marygold (or rather by being kissed by her), he turned her into a “living” (so to speak) gold ingot that should not have been. The irony is still pushed further when Midas reflects on the superficially innocent practical joke which, unfortunately, came also true: “It had been a favourite phrase of Midas, whenever he felt particularly fond of the child, to say that she was worth her weight in gold” (p.59, “The Golden Touch”). The narrator is conscious that the story could take a too sad turn if he were to describe the heart-rending emotions that assailed poor King Midas. He does it, though, in a wonderfully-contrived paralipsis that says something under the very pretense of wanting not to but actually saying it:

It would be too sad a story, if I were to tell you how Midas, in the fullness of all his gratified desires, began to wring his hand and bemoan himself, and how he could neither bear to look at Marygold, nor yet to look away from her. (p.59, “The Golden Touch”)

The narrative technique consists here in building up an emotional tension which the narrator pretends not to be able to alleviate because this very emotional feeling would almost be unbearable, however paradoxical it may be. Yet, in the very building up, he leads the way to its explosion, which is textually prepared so that the emotional impact on the reading audience won’t be such a traumatic experience after all. In other words, an emotional

expectation is created – it is the role of the very paralipsis “It would be too sad a story if I were to tell you” – in a way to pacify the expected reaction – “too sad a story” implies a flow of tears from the children’s eyes (the intradiegetic as well as extradiegetic ones).

We realize that Hawthorne’s humor is very close to his own moral sense, and we will have the opportunity to meet Midas and his daughter again when we talk about the moral edification of those mythological tales. Between humor, irony and morality, it is truly a love triangle that Hawthorne is drawing for the benefit of his readers’ own human progression. Hawthorne thus uses humor to establish the moral of the story, a more enjoyable manner to educate children than with the traditional ponderous, monotonous, grim lectures provided by ministers, parents, and other authority representatives (p.39).

#### **D. Identification, Reading Engagement and Moral Appeal: Towards a “Puritanization” of Greek Mythology**

*“‘And besides,’ continued Eustace, ‘the moment you put any warmth of heart, any passion or affection, any human or divine morality, into a classic mould, you make it quite another thing from what it was before. My own opinion is, that the Greeks, by taking possession of these legends (which were the immemorial birthright of mankind), and putting them into shapes of indestructible beauty, indeed, but cold and heartless, have done all subsequent ages an incalculable injury.’” “Tanglewood Fireside: After the Story”, “The Three Golden Apples”<sup>iv</sup>*

##### **1. Children’s Interest and Identification: their Reading/Listening Engagement**

Children are both an easy and difficult public. They can easily love as they can easily hate (or, in other less “positive” words, they can hardly love) what they are given to listen or read. Children literature thus requires some formal narrative techniques to create, maintain and justify children’s interest. One such way is claim that there is more to be told than what is actually being told, and the only way to find it out is to go on listening. The narrator uses a metanarrative bait to entrap his young preys in his narrative net. It is thus truly a close two-way relationship that the storyteller builds up between him and his docile audience. Indeed, the latter provides the former with the necessary and attentive ears that he needs to *be* a storyteller, and the former offers the latter some exciting moments that will nourish their dream-world with exhilarating, original and nowhere-else-to-be-seen creatures (p.33). Another way, closely related to the first, to maintain the audience’s interest is to literally

make a long story short by affirming (while apologizing for) the fact that the teller has a lot more to tell but does not have the time for it. This metanarrative trick is a double-edged weapon to wield with extreme care and virtuoso. While it can point at a potential and probable lack of plot mastery from the teller's part, it can also whet the audience's interest who, perhaps craving for more such cut (but not censored!) adventures, will hopefully claim for more story-telling sessions. The teller keeps something up his narrative sleeve that will motivate another session. Which will thankfully be the case for Eustace Bright, who will be the target of the children's hungry ears.

Another effective ways to stir and keep children's attention is to play, smartly and with finesse (but not too much), with words, sounds, and, especially, with the infinite combinations of words and sounds. Thus the "shadow brook" of the title becomes the "shady nook" "where summer had cooled herself, [and] was now the sunniest spot anywhere to be found" (p.44, "The Golden Touch"). The successive [s] sound creates a sympathetic and harmonious atmosphere into which the children will be set in the right mood to receive Eustace's bright tales of dark humane tragedy, and if they are as good as gold, maybe they will be offered another of Eustace's gifted stories.

Whereas in "The Gorgon's Head" the story-telling took place in the morning, in "The Golden Touch", it unfolds after dinner-time. We are told that "In the dell of Shadow Brook, Eustace Bright and his little friends had eaten their dinner. They had brought plenty of good things from Tanglewood, in their baskets, and had spread them out on the stumps of trees, and on mossy trunks, and had feasted merrily, and made a very nice dinner indeed. After it was over, nobody felt like stirring." (p.45, "The Golden Touch"). The children of the implied audience of Hawthorne's tales, the real publishing target, are almost made jealous of this merry little party, lucky enough to have been on a picnic on such a sunny day and in such a wonderful place as the Shadow Brook, near Tanglewood. They are made to envy their fictional counterparts, wishing they would and could be them. Everything is done to lull kids into this peaceful imaginary world from which they will also very soon be transported into another such fanciful mythical universe. Like their fictive friends, they do not feel like stirring from their comfortable armchairs!

The childish diction is everywhere present in those mythological tales and the passage above quoted is a case in point of such peculiar way of speaking. The repetition of the

coordinator “and” confers a musicality which, somewhere else, would sound more tragic and fatefully ponderous. This musical rhythm is elsewhere produced by the repetition of vocalic or consonantic items. Repetition is thus the key to child literature, as it also enables a more fluid and captivating reading. Trivial and common actions such as to feast or make a nice dinner are blown out of realistic proportions, almost as if they have been turned into epic adventures for themselves. The accumulative and graded rhythm culminates in the well-deserved break that is provided for, at the textual level, by the period closing this enumeration, but also, at a semantic and, even more specifically, grammatical level, by the subordinate segment “after it was all over”.

## 2. Moral Appeal

The attempt at or rather the hope for identification by the children goes by several narrative tricks, and one of them is to give what can be called edifying moral lessons. And such lessons can be taught through the use of only one specific word. Let's take an example that we have already used for another argument earlier. The shadowy summertime scenery described by the narrator in the introductory to “The Golden Touch” cedes its place to a golden dell, thereby timidly but probingly creating a revealingly pertinent setting, the hues and colors of which are perfectly in harmony with what these same colorful tints announce, namely the golden touch of the ensuing narrative: “But now, ever since autumn was changed to gold, so that it really kindled up the dell, instead of shading it.” (p.44, “The Golden Touch”). The alchemist metaphor is from the outset integrated in the primary literary crucible into which Eustace Bright/Nathaniel Hawthorne will broil his own magical fanciful recipe. The natural transformation of the color of the scenery into another such naturally acquired tint – this gold or golden hue – prefigures the fatal and tragic transformation of every familiar object Midas will fatefully come into contact with. So that the positive and almost healthy natural consequence of this colorful change is a greatly ironic twist of the divine-like author as he warned his young audience against the pagan-like and sinful act of mimicking and mocking the great works of Nature, this Mother Earth who sheds her benevolent light over all its creatures made in flesh and feathers. The narrator thus induces his public to take a retrospective trip back to this naturally acquired alchemist gold and compare it with the catastrophic and fatal gold won by Midas's fantastic gift.



The strain for Puritanization in this collection of mythological tales consists partly in the moral edification of the hero who is set as an example, who sets the right example to the attentive children. One form of such edification can be what we can call the humorous moralization of apparently absurd doings. In the case of the Gorgons, the narrator warns his listeners against an abusive use of one's vision, and invites them to demonstrate a certain degree of forbearance in the use of their unique and common eye (pp.30-32)! What can be made of that!? Maybe that one's vision is a precious divine gift not to be dispensed with without care and moderation (a moral one or just a physical, biological one?). Or that one is blind until one has come to know what sight means? Anywise, something is said, and maybe, after all, all that Hawthorne is trying and intending to do is stimulate a reflection, no matter how far-fetched it may seem at first sight.

Moral edification can also be achieved through the use of potentially symbolical semantic items, and the names of the heroes are part and parcel of this process of semantically provided moralization. The name of Midas's daughter – Marygold – is, in this respect, relevant, and it is so at two levels. From a metadiegetic point of view, it is an open reference to all those children who are listening to Eustace with keen interest and attentive fascination. Indeed, they all share this nominative floral kinship which, besides being an effective mnemonic way to remember those names (we must not forget – as if we could – that children are the principal publishing target aimed at by Hawthorne) as they partake of the overall childish ambiance created by the author. From a purely diegetic and symbolical level, “Marygold” points to the allegorical portrait sketched by Hawthorne's narrative purposeful brush. Indeed, the orthographic liberty taken by the author illustrates this symbolical turn. The replacement of the initial <i> by a significant <y>, which phonologically and phonetically mimicks the relative pronoun “why”, is truly not a mere capricious whim by the all-powerful egotist author. It introduces this utterly metaphysical question, this “why” which will, hopefully, urge the young audience to reflect on the nature of Midas' motivations, and, hopefully again, will refrain from following in his fatal golden footsteps. The religious, even Catholic dimension introduced in this mythological setting is precisely what Hawthorne has succeeded to achieve. He successfully reshaped the initially pagan, or at least, polytheist intellectual and narrative disposition of this myth to match and serve his puritan mindset but also the puritan expectations of his nineteenth-century American audience, grown-up or young. Finally, the daughter's name also rings a tragic ironic note in Midas' own ear as his

child will literally be turned to gold under his own cursed hand. There will be no merry joy left in Midas' heart whose own tears, blending with the magnificently pure and purifying water of the fountain, will be shed to melt his golden child back into a fleshly little girl.

From the start, the character of Midas evinces a flaw that will necessarily precipitate his fall, pulling the only dear person down with him. Indeed, he is presented as a strictly material man whose heart proves to be as cold as the gold he so much cherishes and values: "This King Midas was fonder of gold than of anything in the world" (p.47, "The Golden Touch"). The narrator smartly intimates his reader to look for some fatally dramatic catastrophe to occur from this peculiar avidity for gold. He, in a way; qualifies this piecemeal judgment, stating, though quite reservedly, that

If he loved anything better or half so well, it was the one little maiden who played so merrily around her father's footstool. But the more Midas loved his daughter, the more did he desire and seek for wealth. (p.47, "The Golden Touch")

But this qualifying comment is greatly undermined by its syntactical architecture. The typically Hawthornian resort to the epanorthosis, this figure of speech which constantly makes the discourse reflect upon and back on itself, turn in on itself, which creates the famous "fold" (or *pli*), a sign of extradiegetic interference meant to signal and signify the rightful interpretative course delineated by the cynical author. This "half so well" comparative qualitative quantification, in itself a tragic mistake committed by Midas, condenses the whole forthcoming tragedy. Indeed, love should not be made to weigh in the same scales as with precious metals, however precious and rare they may be. It is not a quantifiable commodity one can scale up or down according to some price rate. In fact, from the moment Midas evaluated the preciousness of his only blood relative in literal, material terms, following the current gold rate, the king triggered his own figurative devaluation. Especially so as this father pretends to "seek after wealth" only for the sole sake of his daughter. This pretendedly selfless gold rush hides in fact a purely egotistic, selfish gold lust that will prove his motivations wrong. His duplicity points to a moral deformity that will inevitably and ineluctably fall back on himself. The open condemnation, thrung by a dismayed and appalled narrator, this "foolish man!" (p.47, "The Golden Touch") is a clearly irrevocable reproach towards these seeking men who tend to obliterate every truly valuable object around them, wishing as they do they could have everything in this own possession.

King Midas's daughter's name is even ironically tragic when we consider the king's former sane taste for flowers:

And yet, in his earlier days, before he was so entirely possessed of this insane desire for riches, King Midas had shown a great taste for flowers". (p.47, "The Golden Touch")

This dramatic cordial transformation, which turned King Midas from a benevolent and merry gardener into a malevolent and frustrated alchemist-like figure, is a typical Hawthornian evolution, a downward evolution if we may say so. "Marygold" is literally the flower turned into gold by the very hands that so far have attended with loving care and sweet tenderness to its merriness. His own relationship with the "biggest and beautifullest and sweetest" (p.47, "The Golden Touch") flowers of this fragrant garden has dramatically changed overnight. This fatal mutation takes its source in the gardener's growing dissatisfaction with the free beauties Nature so generously endows him with. He rapidly began to think in terms of financial profit:

But now, if he looked at them at all, it was only to calculate how much the garden would be worth if each of the innumerable rose-petals were a thin plate of gold. (p.48, "The Golden Touch")

Little did he know that his wish was soon to be granted, and well granted, and that he was to bitterly regret it:

Somehow or other, this last transformation [Marygold's handkerchief being turned into a fine tissue of gold thread] did not quite please Kind Midas. He would rather that his little daughter's handiwork should have remained just the same as when she climbed his knee and put it into his hand. (p.53, "The Golden Touch")

Is Midas having unspeakable remorse at his golden wish? Is he not, though unconsciously so, drawing a fatal parallel between this piece of handiwork lovingly wrought by his sweet daughter, and her, the only pure precious object worth the world's whole amount of gold? As if he felt that to lose the handkerchief was a foretaste to the future loss of his own daughter; as if he knew that to lose his daughter would be more unbearable than to lose all the gold he could ever lay his golden hands on. And this revelation will contradict his theory of what we can call "relative compensation", according to which "We cannot expect any great good without its being accompanied with some small inconveniences" (p.53, "The Golden Touch"). This wrong doctrine of believing in "one good for one evil" is not right to adhere to, and the following unfoldings will tend to prove that nothing is worth the losing of one's heart

and humanity. Because, at the end of the day, Midas turned himself into an utterly insensitive (and insensible) cold-hearted dark-souled monster. With all the brightness shining on and from him, he could not be in darker, and more profound darkness as the one he plunged himself voluntarily into, and which the loss of his eyeglasses only the more symbolizes at the same time as it materializes it.

We spoke, just a little while ago, of his former taste for gardening, a taste that was to be progressively overtaken by a more powerful inclination to riches. So much so that

Midas knew a way to make them [the rose-petals] more precious according to his way of thinking, than roses had ever been before. (p.54, "The Golden Touch")

Here we are witnessing the literalization of what, so far, has remained in the figurative sphere of phantasmatic language. The calculation, purely mathematical computation he daily made at the sight of his worthless rose-petals came true, and, now, these are really worth their weight in gold. The figurality underlying this uncommon wish has been overwhelmed by its latent potentiality of materialization. The literal is made figurative, and the figurative literal, as is often the case in Hawthorne's short and long fiction. This, Midas, is far from regretting it (just as yet), but Marygold is quite upset by this sudden change:

‘Ah, dear Father!’ answered the child, as well her sobs would let her; ‘it is not beautiful, but the ugliest flower that ever grew! As soon as I was dressed I ran into the garden to gather some roses for you; because I know you like them, and like them the better when gathered by your little daughter. But, oh dear, dear me! What do you think has happened? Such a misfortune! All the beautiful roses, that smelled so sweetly and had so many lovely blushes, are blighted and spoilt! They are grown quite yellow, as you see this one, and have no longer any fragrance! What can have been the matter with them?’ (p.55, "The Golden Touch")

Marygold is the lens through which one needs to glance to reach the deeply rooted truth that escapes the bright-sighted King Midas. She represents and enacts the sensitive conduct to adopt in our intercourse with the natural –here, vegetal, and floral – world. She even succeeds in wrenching a feeling of shame from her father's leaden heart. She is also the one who can stir a feeling of pity in the reader's hearts. This, to be sure, the narrator metanarratively emphasizes in this invitation to heart-renting sentimentality: "And, truly, my dear little folks, did you ever hear of such a pitiable case in all your lives?" (p.58, "The Golden Touch").

The crucial moment of the fatal, fateful, and heart-breaking **ANAGNORISIS** has finally come, and it coincides with the reappearance, and reappearance, of the strange young man by whom this un hoped-for but regretted gift has been endowed to King Midas. The moral lesson is crystal clear, and the cupid King need learn it at a great price: “Very miserable, indeed!” (p.60, “The Golden Touch”), such is the reaction of the young man, who almost fails to understand King Midas, doubting, after all, if he really realized his uttermost dream. He is also the one who puts in words the moral lesson:

‘Ah! So you have made a discovery, since yesterday?’ observed the stranger. ‘Let us see, then. Which of these two things do you think is really worth the most, - the gift of the Golden Touch, or one cup of pearl cold water?’ (p.60, “The Golden Touch”)

He nevertheless gives King Midas the ultimate chance to expiate for his golden sin, and this chance takes the form of a philosophical ultimatum, which he repeatedly formulates in several different ways, each times weighing a symbolically precious (and natural) gift with or rather against the physically precious gold that King Midas had at hand’s reach. These ultimatums emphasize the tragic gap that separates the insane material craving that was the very cause of Midas’s intricate predicament and the healthy yearning for natural bounties that was to be his salvation. It is the final test by which King Midas’s human heart is to be tried. The wisdom acquired (or retrieved, depending on what we believe Midas guilty of, whether loss or lack of reason) by Midas is a very precious one, one which he could not have gained without incurring this relatively insignificant and temporary loss. The expression “my child, my dear child!” is figuratively more powerful and vitally more important than the literal dearness which King Midas experienced just a little while ago:

‘You are wiser than you were, King Midas!’ [...] ‘Your own heart, I perceive, has not been entirely changed from flesh to gold. Were it so, your case would indeed be desperate. But you appear to e still capable of understanding that the commonest things, such as lie within everybody’s grasp, are more valuable than the riches which so many mortals sigh and struggle after.’ (p.61, “The Golden Touch”)

It is a fate that Richard Digby won’t know, he that was turned into stone, that material his heart was made of. King Midas will react just in time, and understand that the commonness of human conditions, which he rejected as a loathsome burden, is the very condition which makes it possible to appreciate those valuable commonest things. Sincerity is the key to purity, a purity even the most precious metal can never achieve and offer humans.

The symbolism of the cleansing river water (the river being situated “past the bottom of [Midas’s] garden” (p.61, “The Golden Touch”) is conspicuous enough not to need further enlightenment:

The first thing he did, as you need hardly be told, was to sprinkle it by handfuls over the golden figure of little Marygold. (p.62, “The Golden Touch”)

No sooner did it fall on her than you would have laughed to see how the rosy colors came back to the dear child’s cheek! And how she began to sneeze and sputter! – and how astonished she was to find herself dripping wet, and her father still throwing more water over her! (p.62, “The Golden Touch”)

The extradiegetic address to the young audience serves to enhance the moral impact of this gleeful outcome, just as it parallels this other intradiegetic address and lecture that King Midas is giving to his own grandchildren, raising himself as the living example of what cupidity can lead to:

‘And to tell you the truth, *my precious little folks*,’ quoth King Midas, diligently trotting the children all the while, ‘ever since that morning, I have hated the very sight of all other gold, save this!’ (p.63, “The Golden Touch”)

## E. Conclusion

“*Why, as to the story of King Midas,*’ said saucy Primrose, *‘it was a famous one thousands of years before Mr Eustace Bright came into the world, and will continue to be so as long after he quits it. But some people have what we may call ‘The Leaden Touch,’ and make everything dull and heavy that they lay their fingers upon.’*

*‘You are a smart child, Primrose, to be not yet in your teens,’ said Eustace, taken rather aback by the piquancy of her criticism. ‘But you well know, in your naughty little heart, that I have burnished the old gold of Midas all over anew, and have made it shine as it never shone before. And then that figure of Marygold! Do you perceive no nice workmanship in that? And how finely I have brought out and deepened the moral! What say you, Sweet Fern, Dandelion, Clover, Periwinkle? Would any of you, after hearing this story be so foolish as to desire the faculty of changing things to gold?’”*

“Shadow Brook: After the Story”, “The Golden Touch”

“Oh, what a day of Indian summer was it going to be! The children snatched their baskets; and set forth, with hop, skip, and jump, and all sorts of frisks, and gambols [...]” (p.43, “The Gorgon’s Head”). If one was not convinced of the nature of this collection of tales, this should set it right. The exclamatory tone, the introductory onomatopoeia, the ternary rhythm of childish physical jerks, the alliterative and consonantic patterns – all this confers to the passage a childish, catchy, lively musicality and vivacity, genuinely assimilating those light children to animal creatures that could well populate Eustace’s imaginary mythological universe. Hawthorne manages to transform this simple and apparently superficial athletic idiomatic phrase (“hop, skip, and jump”) into a significantly telling image of fairy-tales creatures: a unicorn, a winged horse, a sphinx, who knows what is luring at the back of our hawthornesque Eustace’s fanciful mind?

“Once upon a time, there lived a very rich man, and a king besides” (p.47, “The Golden Touch”): Eustace Bright completely adheres to the traditional and classical pattern of fairy-tale telling. From there, the tone is set, and the audience will adapt its own mindset to receive the forthcoming events for what they are, namely magical, fantastic, unreal adventures in a far away and unknown land where people have never been, and, even, which they have never heard of nor about. Eustace accordingly resorts to, again, metanarrative comments which help getting a clearer view of what we are given to read (or listen), as in this quotation where sweet little Marygold is introduced to us:

and he had a little daughter, whom nobody but myself ever heard of,  
and whose name I either never knew, or have entirely forgotten. So,  
because I love odd names for little girls, I choose to call her  
Marygold. (p.47, “The Golden Touch”)

The nowhere-to-be-heard-of commercial strategy aims at claiming the undivided merit for the originality of the story to unfold. In other words, Eustace cannot be accused of plagiarism, even less so as he claims to be totally ignorant of or, at least, forgetful of the potentially original (in the sense of “initial”) source. His preferential taste for significant, symbolical “odd” names is one displayed by Hawthorne himself whose choice of “Una” for his own daughter’s name speaks mountains of his indefatigable attachment of allegorical beauties and wonders.

Eustace Bright is true to himself as his tale dissipated the mist that had gathered before this fanciful morning. Day is as bright as could be, and “a scene was now disclosed which the

spectators might almost fancy as having been created since they had last looked in the direction where it lay” (p.42, “TGH”). The reflection of the “[perfect] wooded banks” of the “beautiful lake” and of “the summits of the more distant hills” (p.42, “TGH”) is the illustrative pathetic fallacy of Coleridgian and Wordsworthian nature, joyfully manifesting the communicative pleasure enjoyed by the jovial literary troop so assembled under the shade of the Tanglewood trees.

I would like to conclude on these words, uttered by the narrator of the *Tanglewood Tales*, at the time when he evaluates the newly-written stories that Eustace Bright submitted to him in response to the success of the *Wonder Book*:

Merely from the titles of the stories, I saw at once that the subjects were not less rich than those of the former volume; nor did I at all doubt that Mr. Bright’s audacity (so far as that endowment might avail) had enabled him to take full advantage of whatever capabilities they offered. Yet, in spite of my experience of his free way of handling them, I did not quite see, I confess, how he could have obviated all the difficulties in the way of rendering them presentable to children. These old legends, so brimming over with everything that is most abhorrent to our Christianized moral-sense – some of them so hideous – others so melancholy and miserable, amid which the Greek Tragedians sought their themes, and moulded them into the sternest forms of grief that ever the world saw; - was such material the stuff that children’s playthings should be made of! How were they to be purified? How was the blessed sunshine to be thrown into them?<sup>vi</sup>

The answer is to be found in *A Wonder Book and Tanglewood Tales*.

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<sup>i</sup> In *A Wonder-Book For Boys and Girls and Tanglewood Tales*, N. Hawthorne, p.68, CE, VII.

<sup>ii</sup> In *A Wonder Book for Boys and Girls and Tanglewood Tales*, N. Hawthorne p.11, CE, VII.

<sup>iii</sup> In *A Wonder Book for Boys and Girls and Tanglewood Tales*, N. Hawthorne, p.69, CE, VII.

<sup>iv</sup> In *A Wonder Book for Boys and Girls and Tanglewood Tales*, N. Hawthorne, p.115, CE, VII.

<sup>v</sup> In *A Wonder Book for Boys and Girls and Tanglewood Tales*, N. Hawthorne, p.64, CE, VII.

<sup>vi</sup> In *A Wonder Book for Boys and Girls and Tanglewood Tales*, N. Hawthorne, pp.178-179, CE, VII.